

**Special Study Fact Sheet:**  
**Report to Congress on the Ecological Role of Killer Whales in the North Pacific Ocean**

**Marine Mammal Commission**  
**February 2005**

As part of its Fiscal Year 2004 Omnibus Appropriations Bill, the Congressional Appropriations Committee directed the Marine Mammal Commission to:

*review available evidence regarding the theory that rogue packs of killer whales are wiping out discreet populations of the most endangered marine mammals.*

To meet the Congressional directive, the Commission plans to undertake a project with three major objectives:

- 1) Assemble and review available information on the role of killer whale predation in limiting populations of marine mammals,
- 2) Identify important gaps in our understanding of the ecological role of killer whales, and develop a research plan to address them, and
- 3) Report back to Congress regarding the ecological role of killer whales and recommendations for future research.

The project will use existing information on the ecological role of killer whales worldwide, and apply that information specifically to the role of killer whales in the North Pacific Ocean, where their possible role in the decline of pinnipeds and sea otters has been particularly controversial. Key areas of information will include such things as killer whale ecotype and stock structure, abundance and trends, broad and fine-scale distribution, foraging patterns, nutritional needs and energetics, and pertinent information on potential prey.

The focal points for this project will be two workshops to be held in the spring of 2005. The workshops will not attempt to repeat the work being done by other federal agencies on killer whales or on marine mammal prey species (cetaceans, pinnipeds, and sea otters), nor will it attempt to confirm the correct theory about the role of killer whales in the North Pacific. Rather, the workshops will seek to provide a comprehensive assessment of existing knowledge about the ecological role of killer whales, including uncertainties in that knowledge and, where possible, provide guidance to reduce the uncertainty in key areas.

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